

parties, which weakened each group's ability to counter Democratic Party moves.<sup>71</sup> Because of the rifts, Republicans and Populists were unable to keep pace and combat the aggressive regeneration of the Democratic Party. Further hampering the Fusionists' ability to combat the Democrat's onslaught was a subtle trend by the federal government which slowly abandoned a nationwide commitment for the protection of civil and political rights of citizens. Proof of the trend could be seen in the failure of the Lodge Force Bill in 1890 and the 1896 *Plessey v Ferguson* Supreme Court decision.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 464-7.

<sup>72</sup> The Lodge Force Bill of 1890, if passed in Congress, would have ensured fair elections for all voters, including African Americans, through the use of federal supervisors. Illegal methods such as intimidation and fraud at polling places would have been federal offences. The Bill passed in the House failed to pass in the Senate. The *Plessey v. Ferguson* ruling in the Supreme Court upheld Louisiana law that separated black and white railroad passengers by cars, provided that cars set aside for blacks were equal in accommodation as those for whites. This "separate but equal" decision codified legal segregation of the races for the courts over the next sixty years. Joel Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 113, 253.